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# TIME-TESTED WAYS TO STRENGTHEN THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Essential components to staying healthy, whether during a pandemic or just every day.

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This document is was created to be a useful resource for **CSAcu Community** and their friends and families. It is not intended to be authoritative or exhaustive. Keep in mind that each of these topics can fill volumes of books and be the subject of countless studies.

There are many different perspectives about how to strengthen the immune system and to be healthy, and this article is meant to be both Chinese Medicine-based as well as rooted in modern science and research, attempting to take into consideration the subtleties and specificities of each. Please continue to research on your own, and absolutely consult a qualified healthcare provider before making any decisions, especially about supplementation. A very important point here: every ***body*** is different, and there is no one-size-fits-all healthcare advice, and there are no silver bullets. In order to make ourselves more robust, more ***anti-fragile***, we need to apply many different methods, and they need to be catered to each individual.

***CSAcu hopes to offer a virtual course on each of the topics listed.***

We sincerely hope you benefit from reading these recommendations and if you have any questions, please feel free to email info@csacu.com

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# Stress

This seems a good place to start!
It is well documented that stress can negatively affect the immune system (and everything else…), but that is only part of the story.[1] There's also the concept of **hormesis**[2], the term that basically means, in Nietzschean terms: "what doesn't kill you will make you stronger." This is dose-specific, however. In other words, it needs to be the *just* the right amount of stress. Too much (and chronic) stress *will* kill us. But just the right amount, along with enough rest afterwards, and we get stronger. Remember, humans are **anti-fragile**.[3]

I believe that the crisis we are in is enough stress to be of hormetic benefit, to help us grow and be stronger - as individuals and as a society. But, this means that in order to benefit from the opportunity of acute stress, we need to decrease all the other stress around us. Easier said than done, of course. How to achieve this?

The immune system and the emotional system are inextricably linked.[4] In other words, our (negative) mood will (negatively) affect our immune system, and the converse is also true. So be happy! And the way we perceive a stressful event can impact our health and our performance - studies[5] show that if we can reframe our thinking to perceive that a particular stressor is beneficial or that we will benefit from it, we actually will!

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# Food

Eat well. Stress can make us want to seek comfort food, but the best thing we can do for our bodies now is to be putting in the best fuel we can. This doesn't mean we should feel guilty for buying Cheez-its or chocolate. It just means that the base of our food pyramid should be nourishing and anti-inflammatory. Just see Dr. Greger's work at https://nutritionfacts.org/

In general, I recommend using food as medicine, and trying to limit the "medicines" we take, whether prescription or supplement. Plenty of good resources on how to get all your "supplements" through healthy foods[6].

Things that contribute to inflammation will put a drain on our resources, and make us less capable of fighting the important battles that our immune system may be called to do. So its a two-pronged approach - eat more foods that decrease inflammation (garlic[7], leafy greens[8], turmeric[9][10], fresh fruits, etc.)[11] and fewer foods that contribute to inflammation[12][13] [14] [15](highly processed foods, fried foods, meats, dairy, etc.)[16]. Nuts and healthy fats are also essential[17] [18]
I usually recommend incorporating 1/4tsp turmeric[19] (truly a superfood when it comes to fighting inflammation and pinch of black pepper daily[20], however you can. You can mix it in water and drink it down if you're the get-it-over-with-quick type, or you can make a tasty tea (goldenmilk[21]) or incorporate into cooking. Doesn't matter. The more garlic the better!

Probiotics have also been shown to boost immune function[22]. Try the live versions in Kefir or sauerkraut.

Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, **fasting[23]** can also be helpful but we will get more into that in a different section. Intermittent Fasting (IF) as well described by Fung[24] is excellent, but fasting for too long can also be too stressful.

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# Exercise[25]

For exercise, I am not a huge fan of stressing the nervous system with high intensity workouts in the environment we are in. High intensity workouts trigger our fight-or-flight response and adrenaline, which we would ideally like to engage less. Again, remember hormesis. Less is more. Too much stress and you'll end up doing more harm, increasing likelihood of injury or illness.[26]
I'm more a fan of low-intensity exercise to get cardio up a little - a vigorous walk or light jog, bodyweight exercises, or of course Tai Chi and Yoga[27]. The common theme in all of this is to down-regulate the autonomic nervous system. To take us out of our fight or flight and into the mode where our bodies can rest, restore, and heal if needed. Don't deplete your reserves. The occasional vigorous workout (maybe once per week) should be fine, but the key here is to not continually overdo it. There is plenty of evidence for resistance training, and I really like the McGuff method spelled out in Body by Science.[28]

The bottom line is, keep moving. Every day you must engage your physical body, even if you are quarantined in a small apartment, there are wonderful workouts that can be done, even in a short time![29]

Continuing in the theme of getting our bodies into a state where our bodies can rest and heal, meditation, breathing exercises, and vagus-nerve techniques are all relevant.

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# Meditation[30]

A broad term used here, I am referring to any number of methods used to calm the mind. Without needing to become a devout Buddhist, there are many ways and reasons that meditation and "mindfulness" can not only boost your immune system, but help you feel better, happier, healthier, and more robust and resilient. A win-win.

The idea here is to get the reader familiar with a number of techniques. The plan is to offer virtual classes for CSAcu community in each or all of the methods listed here. Please inquire if interested.

- **Meditation**
  - **Vipassana**[31]
    - Vipassana means "to see things as they are", as opposed to seeing what we want them to be. This bare-bones Buddhist technique allows us to get to the fundamental habit pattern of the mind - craving or aversion - and to change it at its roots.
  - MBSR[32]
    - For those who love the science, this has all the "woo" taken out of it and looks at how practicing mindfulness can contribute to well-being, happiness, less stress, and improved health.
  - Forest Bathing[33] [34]
    - Just fun! Get in tune with nature with this Japanese technique.
- **QiGong**[35]
  - **1000 Hands Buddha** QiGong Self-Massage
  - **Shaking** from Tendon/Muscle Changing QiGong[36]

        - This will get into cleansing the lymphatic system, see Acupressure section
    - Tai Chi
- **Breathing**
    - The benefits of any breathwork practice range from
        - improved cardiovascular health [37]
        - More energy[38]
        - Better sleep[39]
        - Improved cognition and memory[40]
        - Strengthen immune system[41]
        - General relaxation and decrease anxiety[42]
        - Enlightenment :)
    - Perhaps one of the most relevant benefits in the context of the immune system and in particular the Covid19 is the concept of nasal nitric oxide[43] [44]
    - **Buteyko[45]** Breathing
        - This will be a webinar!
        - Gist is to attempt to exclusively breath through the nose
        - The science is very cool, you're actually attempting to slightly increase blood CO2 in order to facilitate oxygen transfer to the cells.
    - **Pranayama**[46] [47]
- **Vagus Nerve[48] [49]** (Polyvagal theory) Techniques
    - **HRV**
        - **Heart Rate Variability** Good objective, quantifiable measurement of the state of your nervous system. Polyvagal theory (Stephen Porges[50]) tells us all about the minute variation between heart beats can be an indicator of the flexibility and adaptability of the nervous system.
        - There is very cool, easy technology[51] to accurately measure, including an app on your phone, or using the HeartMath technology.
    - **Accessing the Healing Power of the Vagus Nerve[52]**
        - One of my favorite books on very specific exercises to relax by targeting vagus nerve and re-educating the nervous system.
        - Gargle, chant or hum, self massage - its fun!
    - **HeartMath[53]**
        - HeartMath is one of my favorites. It takes the hard science of **HRV** and research on the physiologically and psychologically beneficial effects of

**gratitude** and combine them into an elegant and simple meditation technique.

- **Gratitude**
    - Emmons[54] book gets into it, but so do many of the ancient spiritual teachings across time and cultures. ***Genuine*** gratitude is the key here, though. You can't force it. So start small, with things that are simple to feel grateful about so that you can generate positive and honest feelings of gratitude (think: purring kittens before mother-in-law or angry neighbor). You'll get there, but at first it is very important to not force yourself to feel grateful for things that you aren't genuinely grateful for. This will simply leave you feeling empty and defeated. Be happy about identifying the things that you are truly, deeply grateful for and journal or take mental notes. Do this daily!

# Read

Reading things that are not related to the imminent collapse of society are helpful. A reading list is included at the end of this paper. Remember, the immune system and the emotions are inextricably linked.[55] You can read things just for fun, too :)

# Sleep[56]

Plenty of sleep is not just a luxury but a necessity, so 7-9hrs is the recommendation. And being in tune with nature's circadian rhythms is also enormously beneficial.[57]

L-Theanine[58], Kava kava[59], and melatonin[60] all contribute to relaxation, improved sleep, and improved immunity.

Again, entire books are written on the importance of sleep as well as how to get better sleep. The purpose of this section is to merely highlight it as a critical area if you are concerned about improving your health in general and in particular your immune system.

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# Self-Care/Acupressure

This would be incomplete without a few self-care exercises from a Chinese medicine (CM) perspective. To understand how acupressure or acupuncture might help boost our immune system, we can discuss theory and treatment. For practical and illustrative purposes in this section, let me clarify some nomenclature. Chinese medicine organ systems are descriptions of functions that go beyond their anatomical borders, therefore when describing the CM system we will capitalize (e.g. Lung) and when we are describing simply the anatomical organ we will not capitalize (e.g. lung). This simply is a reminder that when we are saying, "Lung" we are referring to much more than the lung. Also, please keep in mind that there really isn't time or space to get into each of these concepts in depth, and that while many of them may seem arcane or even primitive, there is really a high degree of sophistication when we search below the surface and beyond the language. But that is for another paper! This is intended to ultimately be practical.

The concept of *Qi* could be the subject of books, and has indeed been discussed in scholarly circles as well as across dinner tables for literally thousands of years. We won't go into it here, but my favorite suggestion for more information is a book called "Spark in the Machine."[61] Basically we can summarize *Qi* as intelligent organization in the body. It is what allows all the moving parts in the infinitely complex universe of our bodies to operate smoothly and in coordination. When things aren't working right, whether we have illness or pain, we must determine where our *Qi* is dysregulated.

There are many types of *Qi*. Each organ has its own *Qi*. And then each functional aspect of the body (digestive, cardiovascular, cognitive, immune, respiratory, reproductive, hormonal, etc.) is described by a different type of *Qi*. One that is of particular importance for us is the *Wei Qi*, translated as *defensive Qi,* and has rough correlate to the immune system. Without getting into the nitty-gritty of Chinese medical theory, the *Wei Qi* is under the auspices of the *Lung* (LU) organ system and the *Triple Burner (TB)* system. This is highly relevant in our discussion of preventing COVID19 but also in terms of generally strengthening your immune system. The connection with the lungs is an obvious one, and in CM the Lung organ system includes the anatomy of not just the lungs but also the entire respiratory tract including esophagus, throat, sinuses and nose, as well as the thymus - another extremely important organ in terms of immune system. Every organ system in CM has a pair, and in this case, the Lung is paired with

the Spleen (SP). As the largest lymphatic organ in the body, it plays a major role in our both our innate as well as adaptive immune system.[62] [63] You can see how this pair is a first-line of defense for our organism. (See Buteyko Breathing for more in-depth understanding of why its important to breath through the nose.) The TB system almost directly correlates to the fascia and the lymphatic system. Again, another pretty easy bridge to conventional medicine in terms of understanding the immune system.[64]

Next, we have to understand two basic concepts that affect *Qi* regulation. Our *Qi* can be damaged in many ways - from physical trauma, overwork, poor diet, extreme emotions, environmental factors[65] (in CM we call these wind, cold, dampness, heat, dryness, and summer heat) and external pathogens. The two ways (for this discussion) that *Qi* flow can be dysregulated is either from a blockage (called *stagnation* in CM) or from a deficiency. Think of the metaphor of a river. The river brings *Qi* downstream, and if there is a blockage (imagine a dam), we will have a deficiency of *Qi* downstream and an excess. Disease can manifest either up or downstream from the blockage. Either way, for our purposes, we are mostly concerned with unblocking any obstructions in our *Qi* flow, and we will do this with acupressure, acupuncture, or Qi Gong.

Once there has been a blockage or disruption to our *Qi* flow for a period of time, this will deplete our resources and cause a deficiency of *Qi.* This *Qi* will need to be replenished, either through diet, herbal medicine, QI Gong, acupressure, or ideally all of them! Additionally, and importantly, the blockage must be addressed. In this case, the metaphor is of our fuel tank that is gradually getting emptier as we are trying to resolve an issue and we need to put more fuel in the tank.

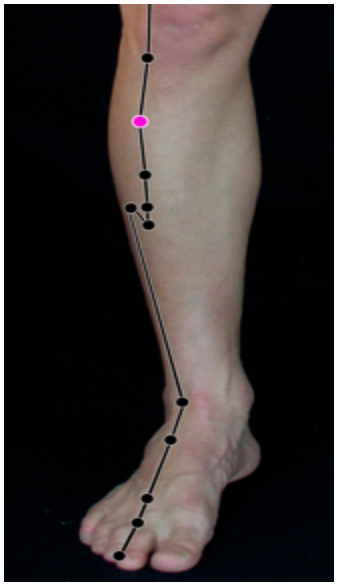
How does this translate to treatment?

Once we've determined that our *Wei Qi* needs boosting, we can take herbs (see formulas in Supplements section) or do Qi Gong (See Meditation section) or do acupressure or acupuncture. By stimulating certain points on the body we will try to strengthen *Wei Qi*, and boost Lung and Triple Burner functions. The other issue that I like to address with acupressure is the *Qi* stagnation, and we do this simply by getting our *Qi* to move. (Unfortunately, we won't be able to cover the elimination of pathogenic factors with acupressure here because diagnosis is extremely important and can take many years to understand well.)

The main points that I like to recommend are the following, although each practitioner may have their own favorites.

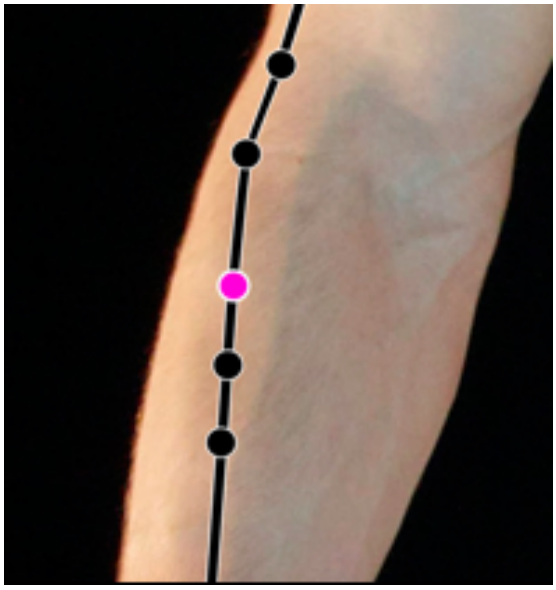
# Wei Qi boosting

**ST 36** - strengthens digestion, boosts immunity, increases energy

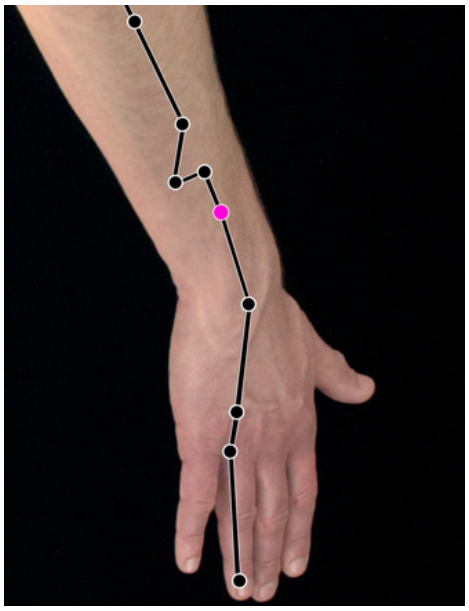


**SP 6** - aids in digestion, helps circulate *Ying Qi* (nutritive *Qi)*

**LI 10** - a favorite to boost immune system



**TB 5** - stimulates lymphatic system, especially in neck, face, and upper torso



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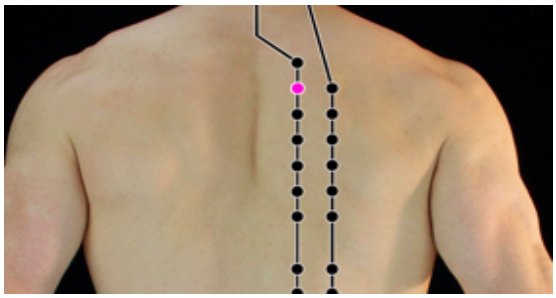
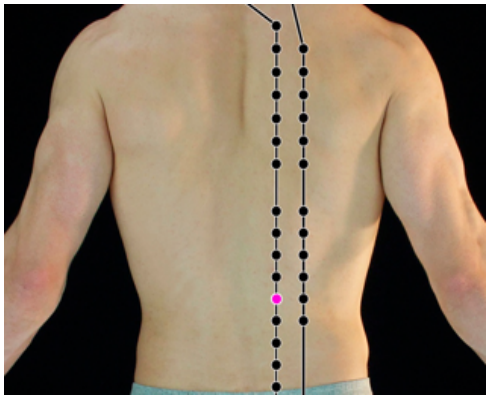
**BL 12, 13** - For Lungs and immune function

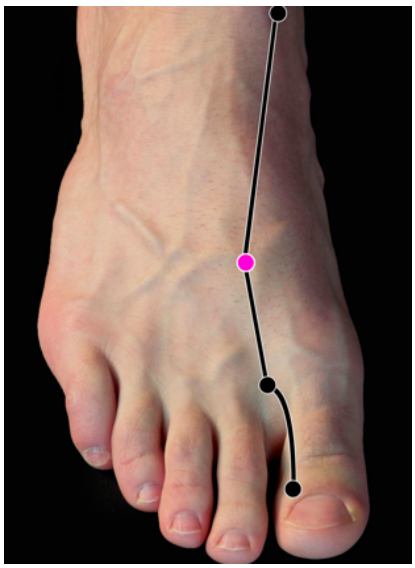


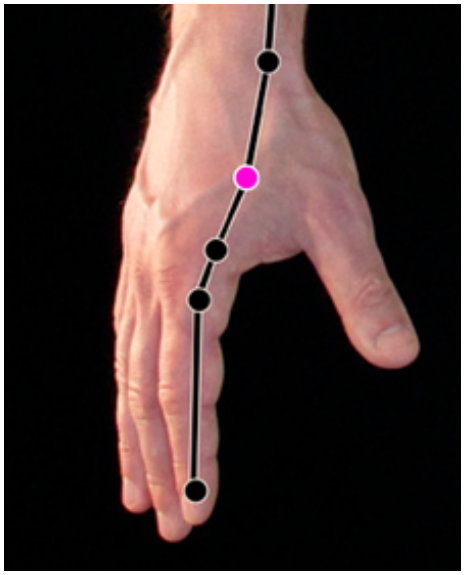
**BL 22, 23** - For immune function and Energy



# Qi Moving

LR 3, LI 4 - Together called "The Four Gates" and are very effective at circulating and unblocking your *Qi.* This is a non-specific recommendation, and is more considered for systemic *Qi* movement.





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# Supplements

This is last on the list because, while I value supplements, I consider them just that - supplementary. They should not be our first line of defence, and should just be used to fill the gaps left in the shortcomings in our diet and lifestyle. We should strive to get all we need from the food we eat and the way we live. I really prefer that most of our immune-boosting come from foods. The science shows that we best absorb nutrients in their natural forms and with the "entourage effect"[66], essentially meaning that the active ingredients are more beneficial in the context of their natural environment (i.e. Vitamin C is better from an orange than from a pill).

That said, there are a few things which I commonly recommend:

- **Magnesium**[67]
    - Relaxes muscles, eases tension, promotes deep sleep, essential in production of 800+ enzymes, helps detox liver, contributes to healthy bowels, improves mood. What else do you need??
    - See Dr. Carolyn Dean's book
    - I am a magnesium snob. The only magnesium I recommend is liquid picometer, ionic magnesium. There are two sources that I trust (I have no financial interest in this):
        - ReMag – Dr. Dean's formulation
        - Good State Health Solution – Liquid Ionic Magnesium
    - Dosage: This is typically done by body weight, consuming 10mg/kg/day. Don't start at this dosage, it is recommended that one begin small, at around 100g, and gradually titrate up every three or four days until reaching a therapeutic threshold, likely around the 10mk/kg/day. For example: If you weigh 150lbs, you weigh 68kg. This means you will gradually increase your daily magnesium intake to approximately 680mg/day. This is approximate!
    - Please email or call if you have any questions about magnesium dosing, or read Dr. Dean's excellent book.

- **Vitamin C**
  - Shown to possibly boost immune system[68], but given the trajectory of the course of Covid19 it is recommended to cease taking Vit C once showing symptoms in order to avoid the "cytokine storm"[69]
  - I still recommend trying to get mostly from foods[70]
  - Liposomal Vitamin C is the preferred vehicle for supplementary Vit C. Can take up to 2000mg/day.
- **Elderberry[71]**
  - An immune boosting fruit. Wonderful to be taking when well. Tinctures or capsules, take as directed.
- **Quercetin**
  - My favorite. Lots of research indicate that this may be extremely beneficial in the case of Covid19[72] [73] [74] [75]
  - Recommendation is taking 500mg twice daily. If you have a sensitive stomach, take with food.
- **Vitamin D**
  - Jury is still out as to whether Vitamin D, known to have immune boosting benefits[76] is beneficial in cases of Covid19. Try to get 20-30 min sunlight daily or check your levels, should be in the 40-80ng/ml range
  - My recommendation is that if you would like to take it, best to discontinue if showing symptoms
- **Chinese herbal formulas**
  - Study showing hospital workers during SARS outbreak in Hong Kong didn't contract SARS while taking these formulas[77]
  - Use under guidance of a qualified practitioner :)
- **Probiotics**[78]
  - Remember, you can get these from fermented foods like kefir, sauerkraut, and some yogurts. Try the natural, live versions before buying the pills.
- **Zinc**[79]
  - Zinc is another powerhouse here. Can take up to 50mg daily. Remember, if taking long-term, is best to make sure you are getting enough copper. This can be done with cacao :), but a supplement can be helpful here as well, such as a balanced Zinc/Copper pill that is formulated to the correct ratio

# Reading List (a fun place to start)

**Back Pain**

Healing Back Pain - Sarno
Foundation – Goodman
8 Steps to a Pain-Free Back - Gokhale
Back Mechanic – McGill

**Breathing**

Prana and Pranayama – Saraswati
The Oxygen Advantage – McKeown
Becoming the Iceman – Hof
Let Every Breath - Vasiliev

**Cancer**

Radical Remission – Turner
How to Starve Cancer - McLelland
Cancer Secrets: An Integrative Oncologist Reveals How… - Stegall

**Chinese medicine – for the layperson**

Spark in the Machine – Keown
Tooth from the Tiger's Mouth – Bisio
Pearl from the Dragon's Neck – Bisio
Your Yin Yang Body Type – Wagman
Acupuncture in Black and White – Godwin
The Web That Has No Weaver- Kaptchuk

**Daoism**

Secret of the Golden Flower – Wilhem and Jung
Effortless Living – Gregory
Daoist Sleeping Meditation - Bisio
The Taoist I Ching – Cleary
Fourth Uncle in the Mountain – Nguyen

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The Tao of Health, Sex, and Longevity – Reid
Understanding Reality – Po

**Exercise**

Overcoming Gravity - Low
Convict Conditioning – Wade
Bodyweight Workouts - Xiong
Body by Science - McGuff

**Fascia**

Fasica – What it is and why it matters - Lesondak
Anatomy Trains – Meyers
The Endless Web – Schultz

**Western Herbalism**

The Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism – Wood
Herbal Antibiotics – Buhner
Herbal Antivirals – Buhner
Secret Teachings of Plants – Buhner
Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants – Brill

**Integrative Medicine**

Radical Healing – Ballentine
Movement for Self Healing – Schneider
The Vital Question – Lane
Integrative Medicine – Rakel
The Magnesium Miracle - Dean

**Longevity**

Circadian Code – Panda
Longevity Code – Verburgh
The Longevity Diet – Longo
It Starts With Food – Hartwig
The Longevity Paradox - Gundry
Lifespan - Sinclair

**Meditation/Philosophy**

The Art of Living – Goenka
The Way of Energy – Chuen
Dhammapada – Buddha J
How to Sit – Thich Naht Hanh
Secret of the Golden Flower – Cleary
Heart Intelligence – Childre
Flight of the Eagle - Krishnamurti
Nonzero - Wright
The Wisdom of Insecurity – Watts
Die Wise – Jenkensen
Discourses on the Sober Life: How to Live 100 Years – Cornaro
Everyday Blessings – Kabat-Zinn
Zen Physics – Darling
Thanks!: How the new science of gratitude can make you happier - Emmons

**Mind/Body Medicine**

How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body - Hamilton
How to Change your Mind – Pollan
Activate the Vagus Nerve - Habib
The Brain that Changes itself – Doidge
The Healing Power of the Mind – Thondup
You Are the Placebo – Dispenza
The River of Consciousness – Sacks
My Stroke of Insight – Taylor
The Biology of Belief – Lipton
The Polyvagal Theory – Porges
Accessing the Healing Power of the Vagus Nerve - Rosenberg

**Miscellaneous:**

Power, Sex, Suicide – Lane
Mountains Beyond Mountains – Kidder
Three Cups of Tea – Mortensen

Tribe – Junger
The Bonobo and the Atheist – de Waal
Mitochnodria and the Future of Medicine – Green
A Brief History of Everything – Wilbur

**Nutrition/Fasting:**

The poor, misunderstood calorie - William Lagakos
How Not to Die - Greger
Deep Nutrition - Shanahan
The Art and Science of Low Carbohydrate Performance – Volek and Phinney
The Complete Guide to Fasting - Fung
Eating Animals - Foer
Metabolic Autophagy - Land
Eat to Live – Furman
Omnivore's Dilemma – Pollan
The Obesity Code - Fung

**Thyroid**

Hashimoto's Thyroiditis – Wentz
The Thyroid Connection - Myers

**Vision and Chinese medicine**

Yoga for Your Eyes – Schneider
Healing your Eyes with Chinese medicine - Rosenfarb
Eye Yoga - Battenberg

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[1]Enhancing versus Suppressive Effects of Stress on Immune Function: Implications for Immunoprotection and Immunopathology
[2]https://microbialcell.com/researcharticles/when-less-is-more-hormesis-against-stress-and-disease/#ITEM-2988-6
[3]https://www.amazon.com/Antifragile-Things-That-Gain-Disorder/dp/B00A2ZIZYQ/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=antifragile&qid=1586392956&s=audible&sr=1-1
[4] Affective immunology: where emotions and the immune response converge
[5] Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality.
[6] Supplements - Perfect Health Diet
[7] The Immunomodulation and Anti-Inflammatory Effects of Garlic Organosulfur Compounds in Cancer Chemoprevention
[8] Eating green veggies improves immune defenses
[9] Immunomodulators Inspired by Nature: A Review on Curcumin and Echinacea
[10](PDF) "Spicing Up" of the Immune System by Curcumin
[11]Xenohormesis
[12] Designing and developing a literature-derived, population-based dietary inflammatory index.
[13] Low-grade inflammation, diet composition and health: current research evidence and its translation
[14] The Messy Facts about Diet and Inflammation
[15] Stress, Food, and Inflammation: Psychoneuroimmunology and Nutrition at the Cutting Edge
[16]https://www.amazon.com/Inflammation-Nation-Definitive-Preventing-Anti-Inflammatories/dp/B07HCRZ5WL/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=inflammation+nation&qid=1586390256&s=audible&sr=1-1
[17] Mammalian Sirt1: insights on its biological functions
[18] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23329830/
[19] The Chemistry of Turmeric – Fluorescence, Indicator, and Health Effects
[20]https://www.amazon.com/How-Not-Die-Discover-Scientifically/dp/B016CME5B4/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=gregor+how+not+to+die&qid=1586390174&sr=8-2
[21]Turmeric latte: the 'golden milk' with a cult following
[22] Daily intake of fermented milk with Lactobacillus casei strain Shirota reduces the incidence and duration of upper respiratory tract infections in healthy middle-aged office workers
[23]https://www.amazon.com/The-Longevity-Diet/dp/B07B79F6WV/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=longo+longevity+diet&qid=1586390198&s=audible&sr=1-1
[24]https://www.amazon.com/Obesity-Code-Unlocking-Secrets-Weight/dp/B01MRKEO0U/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=jason+fung&qid=1586390230&s=audible&sr=1-2
[25] Exercise and stress reduction.
[26] https://www.lesmills.com/research/
[27] The Effects of Tai Chi Chuan Relaxation and Exercise on Stress Responses and Well-Being: An Overview of Research
[28]https://www.amazon.com/Body-Science-Research-Strength-Training/dp/B07VT6LX38/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=mcguff+body+by+science&qid=1586390281&s=audible&sr=1-1
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